



The Chicago International Film Festival

Cinema/Chicago and the Chicago International Film Festival

Education Program Screening: *Shake the Dust*

Director: Adam Sjöberg

85 minutes

Please use the below synopsis/study questions to lead your students in film preparation and post-screening discussion. Following the field trip, students are required to respond to the screening with a one-page essay. Essays must be sent to Cinema/Chicago in order to be invited to subsequent film screenings.

Synopsis

The documentary *Shake the Dust*, by journalist-turned-filmmaker Adam Sjöberg, chronicles the far-reaching influence of breakdancing, exploring how it strikes a resonant chord in the slums, favelas and ghettos of the world. While each culture adopts and adapts hip-hop music, blending it with their own traditions, the breakdancing moves act as a universal language.

Moving smoothly between breakdance crews in the poorest urban neighborhoods of Colombia, Yemen, Uganda, and Cambodia, Sjöberg weaves together the stories of rappers, DJs, and b-boys across three continents, revealing how breakdancing today acts as a positive force for social change. Older generations are passing along their moves and showing kids, most of whom are orphans, that the “family” of hip-hop can be an alternative to street gangs and drug addiction.

Breakdancing in the United States

Breakdancing (originally B-boying or breaking) is a style of street dance that originated primarily among African American but also Puerto Rican youth. Breakdancing was further developed by Puerto Rican youth in New York City in the late 1970s to the early 1980s.

The dance spread worldwide due to popularity in the media, especially in regions such as the United Kingdom, Canada, Japan, Germany, France, Russia, and South Korea.

While diverse in the amount of variation available in the dance, b-boying consists of four kinds of movement: *toprock*, *downrock*, *power moves*, and *freezes*. B-boying is typically danced to hip-hop, funk music, and especially breakbeats, although modern trends allow for much wider varieties of music along certain ranges of tempo and beat patterns.

A practitioner of this dance is called a *b-boy*, *b-girl*, or *breaker*. Although the term “breakdance” is frequently used to refer to the dance in popular culture and in the more mainstream

entertainment industry, "b-boying" and "breaking" are the original terms. These terms are preferred by the majority of the pioneers and most notable dancers.

Study Ideas/Questions

1. Each of the dancers say they want to change how people outside of their city define and perceive their culture and community. Why do you think this is so important to them? How have you seen Chicago identified in the media?
2. What similarities do you see among the five dance crews highlighted in the film? How do these similarities fit into the theme of community?
3. The film suggests that an art form – like dance – can connect different cultures and communities, even with great distance or differences between them. Do you think this is true?
4. Mark of the Breakdance Ugandan Project says he views the world “slum” as an acronym for “s.l.u.m.: social lessons use for the mind.” What do you think this means, and how does the film agree with Mark?
5. What do you think the title *Shake the Dust* means? Why do you think the director chose it as the title for the film?
6. How do you define “community”? Think about who is part of YOUR community: your family, friends, school, church, etc.
7. How can art (film, music, etc.) shape a community? How does it shape your community?
8. Towards the end of the film, hip-hop and breakdance are described as a “culture that gives you hope.” Do you agree or disagree with that statement? Why or why not?
9. How are the areas where the crews live portrayed throughout the film? Why do you think the director chose to show the areas the way he did?
10. Do you look at breakdancing differently after seeing the film than before seeing the film? How so?
11. Throughout the film, the director uses mostly close up shots and medium shots. Discuss the difference between these types of shots. Why do you think he chose to use closer perspectives and how does it change the “feeling” of the film as you watch it?
12. The film is produced by the musical artists Nas, Common and Talib Kweli. Why do you think they were involved in the film? How does their involvement change your perception of the film (if at all)?

13. Each of the crew members talks about the connection between their styles of breakdance and the original U.S. breakdance movement. Why do you think they make those comparisons?
14. Which crew was your favorite and why?
15. How do you express yourself? Through dance, art, music or words? If someone asked you to explain your art or passion, how would you explain what you do, why you do it and why it matters?

Useful Resources

Film website (includes trailers and reviews): www.shakethedust.org

Chicago International Film Festival website: www.chicagofilmfestival.com

**Schools who do not send in essay requirement will not be allowed to attend future Education Screenings.*